



Plenary Council Closing Address
by
The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
President of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia
Saturday, 9 October 2021

As we come to the conclusion of this First General Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia I would like to call us back to the words of Pope Francis which shaped the direction of the agenda which has guided our encounters this week. In a sense the Pope's words might almost be for us a way of discerning both our individual engagement with the assembly this week and our journey together: Pope Francis often reminds us that synodality means walking together we have been walking together this week - and in rejoicing in that, and thanking God for that, we can also ask ourselves how well have we avoided the danger of walking alone, or only in a small group of like-minded people? So let us listen again to Pope Francis:

I dream of a missionary option: that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation.

Many times this week we have been reminded that the Church does not exist for its own sake but rather exists to help bring about the Kingdom of God. As I remarked in the homily of the solemn Opening Mass of the Plenary Council, we, the Church, are called to be together "*a sign and an instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people*". This week we have tried to discern together how we, the Church, can become more fully a clear, unambiguous and effective sign of this communion. We have done this because we are sure that it is as the People of God, the body of Christ in the world, that we can be God's instrument for the establishment of God's kingdom. All week we have been exploring together possible ways of re-casting ourselves, re-positioning ourselves, the Church in Australia, for this mission. And this exploration will continue.



We have lived through what has been an inspiring, challenging and sometimes unsettling week for many of us. We have been told of the joy of belonging to the Church and the hope it brings into the lives of many. But we have, too, touched the pain of those who have suffered, and continue to suffer, through their engagement with the Church. As we respond to all of this we are called, I believe, to heed the words of Saint Paul who tells the Christians in Philippi, and us: *you must have in you the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.*

Through the rich variety of experiences this week, and all the challenges and frustrations we have faced, we have been deeply engaged in the work and the art of group discernment. This has called us to embrace the sometimes quite demanding idea that the voice of God may indeed be heard in the voices of others, even when they jar with us or at times unsettle us. We have learned, through practice, and continue to learn through practice, to listen deeply and carefully, certainly in a respectful way, which can be demanding enough, but also in an open-hearted way, which can be more demanding still.

In all of this we are, perhaps tentatively at times, charting a new way forward - the way of synodality.

As we do move forward in the next nine months, and beyond, we will have to discern carefully in what ways and to what extent we can and must walk together holding in creative tension many different and contrasting voices, and where it might be that God is pointing us in a particular direction and we are all called to follow, together.

Today we draw to a close the first phase of the celebration of the Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia. This week has been a culmination of many years of preparation for this important event in the life of the Lord's Church here in this land. As I mentioned at the beginning of this address we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone who has been and who will continue to be, with us, a part of the journey. We are, indeed, a people who must and do rely on each other in order to build the Kingdom of God.

This period of celebration of the Plenary Council is also a journey which will last for nine months. Although we will all now need to take some well-deserved rest in whatever ways that might be possible for us in the midst



of the realities of our daily lives, we do not stand still. The journey continues and will call for our engagement in many different ways. Certainly, after whatever time we can take for rest and renewal, we will need to remain open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who will lead us more deeply into all that we have shared together this week. We remain, together, members of this solemn assembly and will remain so until the end of the second and final assembly in July next year. We await indications from the Steering Committee as to how the work of this week will be carried on in the months to come and in what ways we will be invited to continue in our role as members of the Council. The bonds we have forged and the trust we have established will serve us well as these months unfold.

At his Last Supper Jesus promised to send his Holy Spirit to the community of his first disciples and as he died on the cross we are told, in John's Gospel, that he breathed out his Spirit over the infant Church gathered at the foot of the cross in the person of the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple. In a sense we, too, have found ourselves gathered at the foot of the cross this week because, as again John's Gospel reminds us, Jesus was lifted up so that all the scattered children of God would be gathered into one. We have experienced this gathering, this oneness, throughout this week, sometimes as a powerful reality and sometimes as a dream for which we are longing and which is so often only imperfectly realised. It is a oneness, a communion, that as it grows will enable us to throw everything we are and have into the great task of bringing the light of Christ into the dark and lonely places of our world and of our own lives.

This week we have not been alone, notwithstanding the isolation which has been forced upon many of us because of Covid. We have been accompanied by the prayers of our brothers and sisters in the community of faith who are looking to us with so much hope. It is these brothers and sisters to whom we will now return. We have carried their hopes and dreams into our plenary assembly. We will continue to walk with them as we share our experience of the Plenary Council with them and as we reflect with them on the ever present and pressing question: *what do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*

As we conclude our time together this week I want to offer you the same thought I shared with you at the beginning of our assembly: The Lord Jesus is always with us; he remains faithful and true; and he says to us



Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth

as he said to his first disciples: *take courage, I am with you, do not be afraid.*

With these words, and in accordance with Article 28 of the Statutes and Regulatory Norms of the Plenary Council I hereby adjourn this First General Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia and I summon members to resume for the Second General Assembly of the Council in Sydney on the fourth of July 2022.

May God, who has begun the good work in us, bring it to fulfilment.